



# PSC NEWS

## Missouri Public Service Commission

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **PSC COLD WEATHER RULE TAKES EFFECT TODAY**

JEFFERSON CITY—The Missouri Public Service Commission's Cold Weather Rule, designed to help customers with heat-related utility bills, begins on November 1, 2006. The rule will remain in effect through March 31, 2007.

The Cold Weather Rule relates to any residential gas or electric service that is necessary for the proper function and operation of heating equipment. Electric or natural gas service provided by municipalities, electric cooperatives and propane delivered by truck are not covered by this rule since they do not fall under the rate regulations of the Missouri Public Service Commission. The Cold Weather Rule has been a part of the Commission's rules and regulations since 1977.

#### **The Cold Weather Rule:**

- Prohibits the disconnection of heat-related service when the temperature is predicted to drop below 32 degrees during the following 24 hour period.
- Provides more lenient terms permitting reconnection of service for those natural gas customers who have defaulted on a previous Cold Weather Rule payment agreement. A customer can have service restored by making an initial payment of 50% of his/her outstanding balance or \$500, whichever is less, with the deferred balance to be paid in a Cold Weather Rule payment agreement plan. A natural gas utility will not be required to offer more lenient payment terms to keep service on or to reconnect a customer more than once every two years or when a customer has defaulted on a Cold Weather Rule payment plan under this section three or more times.
- Prohibits the disconnection of registered elderly and disabled customers who meet certain income guidelines who make a minimum payment.
- Allows a customer to register with the utility if:
  - 65 years of age or older;
  - Disabled to the extent that the customer has filed with the utility a medical form submitted by a medical physician attesting that such customer's household must have natural gas or electric utility service provided in the home to maintain life or health; or
  - The customer has obtained a formal award letter issued from the federal government of disability benefits.
- Allows customers to budget payments over 12 months.
- Allows customers to extend payment of pre-existing arrears beyond 12 months.

(more)

- Does not require a deposit if payment agreement is kept.
- Requires that customers be notified by mail 10 days before the date the utility intends to shut off service; that an attempt be made to contact the customer within 96 hours before the shut off; that an attempt be made to contact the customer right before the shut off; that notice is left at the home when service has been shut off.
- Requires the customer be notified of possible financial help in paying the utility bill.
- Allows for the reconnection of service for less than the full amount owed.

If a customer is faced with a heat-related utility bill that they can not pay in full, it is important that the customer:

- 1) Contact the utility company.
- 2) State an inability to pay the bill in full.
- 3) Provide income information either by month or annual income.
- 4) Make a minimum payment.
- 5) Enter into a payment agreement.

**It is important to note that in order to receive some of the benefits of the Cold Weather Rule, a customer must sign-up (register) with their heat-related company.**

For more information on the PSC's Cold Weather Rule please see the Commission's website at [www.psc.mo.gov](http://www.psc.mo.gov) or call the Commission's Consumer Services hotline at 1-800-392-4211. Consumers can also receive Cold Weather Rule information from their local natural gas or electric company.